WHOLE NOTE

CORNELL UNIVERSITY ORCHESTRA NEWSLETTER

Fall 2009
Chance Encounter

The symphony meant everything to me during high school some ten years ago. It was really the only subject that challenged me during the dull and repetitive monotony of public education. I had thought, once upon a time, that it would be what I would end up doing for life. A romantic image of my future self—touring the world with only violin and bow in hand had crossed my mind often. Yet, as college approached and the issue of auditioning for conservatories began to be an ever more present reality, I soon realized that I did not have the raw talent to let it be my sole profession. Years passed and I moved on to pursue other interests but still always continued my first passion by playing with various groups. When I came to Cornell for my graduate studies, I was urged to join the CSO by a friend who had been playing in the group for many years by that time. Considering that it was my first time up to the northeast—I had lived in Georgia until that point in time—I had hoped that joining the symphony would help me find some people with common interests.

I have a habit of arriving early to most things I do. The first day of rehearsal I had brought my instrument into the studio over in Rand Hall and headed in early. The first day of anything is slightly awkward no matter how many times you have to go through it. While standing there, I was hoping to strike up a conversation with someone, if only just to pass the time. I am not innately an extrovert and kept trying to awkwardly make eye contact with the couple of people waiting in the hallway. Unfortunately, this was failing miserably, and I had resigned myself to the fact that I would probably just have to make friends later in the semester. At this point, a pretty blonde girl came up to me with her clarinet case in hand, and asked if I knew where the rehearsal room was. I certainly did, along with probably a dozen other repressed topics I had been practicing in...
my head in the chance event that I had happened to
catch someone’s eye earlier on. She was pleasant to
speak to: honest, cheerful and sharp. My experience
in symphonies prior to Cornell was always music-
driven. I craved the intellectual and technical
challenge of playing great musical works—never
caring for the snacks, socializing or trips. Before
meeting her, it was always truly about the music.
Throughout that semester, we quickly became
close friends—always seeing one another during
rehearsals, concerts and whenever we would sneak
into a room to delve into new works we discovered
in the library.

A couple of coffees turned into many dates. Those
many dates turned into a happy relationship
and this past summer I proposed to her. It is not
really my style to make such announcement via
the orchestra newsletter, but who can refuse Chris
after all the sweat and blood he puts into helping
all of us become better musicians? His legacy in
our relationship has not ended yet. In one of our
final concerts together, Margaret and I played the
Ravel Piano concerto with Xak Bjerken. We loved
the second movement so much that we are having
the first minute of the second movement be the
music for when she walks down the aisle. We were
certainly not the best musicians in the symphony
nor did we really improve as much as we had
hoped since then, but the CSO has blessed us with
happiness in so many ways over the past 5 years.
And, on January 2nd, we certainly will think back
to the CSO as the place where we first found one
another.

-VICTOR TZEN & MARGARET KELLOGG, ALUMNI

“What we play is life.”
-LOUIS ARMSTRONG

ACROSS THE SEAS

Ever since my decision to major in China and Asia-
Pacific Studies, I have been determined to join
the student orchestra at Beijing University during
the mandatory study-abroad semester. Orchestra
rehearsals have been a part of my weekly routine
since the “Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star” collective in
fourth grade, and I would be disappointed for that
to ever change. Joining the orchestra was difficult,
at first. I could find neither the audition schedule
online nor the name of the conductor, much less the
conductor’s contact information. However, a string
of chance events enabled my participation in the
orchestra. The administrative office for China and
Asia-Pacific Studies found a student cellist through
another student. Eventually, after a long chain of
phone tag, I found myself sitting in the violin section
with local Chinese students, sight-reading the “Ode
to the Red Flag.”

On the first day of rehearsal, I was struck by the
uncanny similarities between the Beijing University
student orchestra and the Cornell Symphony
Orchestra—specifically, the students’ not-so-subtle
ways of informing me how much food I eat. At Cornell, before rehearsal, I enjoy Southwest Chicken sandwiches, which are preparation for my struggle up Ho Plaza and across the Arts Quad to Lincoln Hall. In Beijing, I burn through the pork dumplings while huffing up five flights of stairs to the Yiyuan rehearsal room. The second thing that struck me was that rehearsal is not conducted in English. This is not entirely surprising since I am perfectly aware that I am in China. However, it is shocking, nevertheless, because I do not always understand what is going on during rehearsal. Thankfully, Mr. Liu, like many conductors, is quite expressive. Therefore, I am able to assume musical directions with almost certain accuracy by recognizing shouted measure numbers and enthusiastic hand gestures.

Joining the local student orchestra has been an enlightening musical and socio-cultural experience. There are still an array of mystifying habits that I continually find surprising, such as keeping sheet music in binders inside plastic sleeves. However, with time, I have adjusted more to the foreign rehearsal structure and have realized that many of the differences are rooted in the Sino-American cultural divide. I have met many phenomenally talented and driven student musicians. In fact, at that point, I had realized that the student musicians in China experience many similar issues with balancing school and music as student musicians at Cornell. As mid-December approaches, I realize that I will be sad but content to leave China, knowing that I have made friends who also share the same passion for playing music with others.

-Minerva Ho, China and Asia-Pacific Studies ‘10

A SENIOR’S PERSPECTIVE

I remember my first CSO rehearsal like it was yesterday. This is probably due to my post-traumatic stress disorder after being hurled head first into a fast-paced sight-reading session of an insane piece that was full of virtually unplayable rhythms. Until I joined CSO, the most modern composition I had ever played was a Ravel string quartet. At that point, “modern” meant “composed in the last 100 years”.

Looking back now, I realize how far I have come as a player because of my experiences in CSO. I no longer start to hyperventilate when presented with a piece of music with intricate rhythms, and these days I am more likely to tell a freshman to “get used to it and quit whining” than I am to sympathize about the lack of Beethoven on our programs. The truth is, CSO is a unique playing experience that most musicians never have, and I feel incredibly blessed and grateful to have been part of such a forward-
Life at Cornell: “Carpe Diem”

Firstly, the albums I have enjoyed lately include “Wolfgang Amadeus Phoenix” – Phoenix; “Viva La Vida or Death And All His Friends” – Coldplay; “Day & Age” – The Killers; and “Funeral” – Arcade Fire.

I am contributing to this incarnation of the CCO/CSO newsletter all the way from sunny La Jolla, CA, where I am pursuing a Ph.D. in Climate Science at Scripps Institution of Oceanography. I graduated Cornell as an Atmospheric Science major earlier this year and was fortunate enough to have played the double bass in CSO, CCO, quintets, or some/all of the above (depending on the semester) for my first three years at Cornell.

I arrived at Cornell in August of 2005 as a wide-eyed, excited, and overwhelmed recent high school graduate. During a time period of great change and adjustment, playing in CSO that first semester was an extraordinarily valuable “constant,” and was a lot of fun to boot. One of my favorite memories from my early days in CSO came during my first week on campus at Cornell. As a freshman that did not have a car, Chris Kim graciously agreed to drive me around to local music shops to look for an elusive German bow. Throughout my years in the orchestra, he was also very open to repertoire suggestions and constructive feedback from us, the musicians – qualities that not every conductor possesses. I continued playing through my junior year and had the opportunity to work with some incredible people along the way, including John Cleese (narrator of CCO’s Peter & The Wolf in Spring of 2006), Malcolm Bilson (mentor for CCO during our “Mozart piano concerto” semester in Fall of 2006), Xak Bjerken (piano extraordinaire), and Nick Walker (professor and accomplished bassist from Ithaca College). The orchestra scene at Cornell is a microcosm of Cornell’s general population; the orchestras contain wonderful, intriguing people who come from just about every different academic and geographic background imaginable. I have not played in an orchestra for almost two years, but will have the opportunity in subsequent years after intense first-year graduate coursework subsides.

And, now, here are some words of wisdom from a post-graduate: savor your time at Cornell. Though life will go on after that time ends, you will one day be able to deeply appreciate all of the doors that Cornell opened for you... so long as you “carpe diem,” never say “no,” and have fun along the way!

-MIKE DEFLORIO, ALUMNUS

"Music expresses that which cannot be put into words and that which cannot remain silent."

-VICTOR HUGO
A FRESHMAN’S PERSPECTIVE

Entering college, one must decide how to react to such a huge wave of change. On one hand it is possible to participate in clubs and activities similar to those from high school. On the other hand, one may pursue entirely new interests, leaving behind their old hobbies. Over the summer, I contemplated which extreme would be more suitable for myself. I decided to settle for a happy medium and continue only one extra-curricular activity from high-school. Therefore, I auditioned for the CSO. I knew continuing the viola, my instrument of choice, was the right decision. Once accepted to the CSO, I began reminiscing of my memorable high-school orchestra days.

Looking back, my high school orchestra days were quite different from the CSO. My high school lacked an orchestra so I decided to join the community orchestra, the ACYO. We met weekly for just 3.5 hours unlike the CSO’s bi-weekly rehearsals. I find meeting twice a week for less time to be more productive. In the ACYO we played mostly shorter pieces, whereas the CSO plays some very long pieces involving multiple movements. The conductor for the ACYO, Gary Langford, was very lenient towards musicians. He was especially pleasant to the violists, which he claimed to be his favorite. In comparison, Chris Kim can be quite strict at points,

Looking Back: CU Orchestra History

Hello! I’m the former orchestra Historian (I’ve since become the Publicity Chairman), and I’d like to inform you of the Orchestra History page on the Cornell Symphony Orchestra website. This page contains a list of almost all the Symphony and Chamber Orchestra’s past concerts, stretching all the way back to 1929. This vast collection was created by spending many hours going through the music library’s archive of old concert programs. Now that information is online and available for anyone to see.

The program list is not quite complete – some years still need to be completed and some gaps filled. Additionally, there are a few ideas for future development of the page. For example, I am considering uploading images of old programs, which would be both interesting and entertaining for current and past orchestra members. There could also be a section for archived rehearsal and concert photos, along with lists of former musicians.

So do you remember all the music you played in your years at Cornell? Are you interested in seeing how the orchestral repertoire has evolved over time? Come check out the website!

Request: There seems to be a few programs missing from the library. If any of you happen to know what the orchestra played between 1973-1975, I would be interested in hearing from you! Also, if anybody has old photos of the orchestra and would like it on the website, feel free to send a copy in.

www.arts.cornell.edu/orchestra/about-history.html

-VANCE GAO, BIOLOGY ’10
**SPRING 2010 SEMESTER**

**SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA**

**Sunday, March 7, 2010 (3 pm)**
Bailey Hall, Cornell University
Sibelius, *Symphony No. 1, Op. 39, in E minor*
6th Annual Cornell Concerto Competition winner TBA

**Saturday, April 24, 2010 (3 pm)**
Ford Hall, Ithaca College
Maurice Ravel, *Daphnis et Chloe Suite No. 2*
Conducting Masterclass with Gustav Meier.
World premiere by Eric’s piece

**Sunday, May 2, 2010**
Bailey Hall, Cornell University
Eric Nathan, *Icarus Dreamt*
P.I. Tchaikovsky, *Francesca da Rimini: Symphonic Fantasy after Dante, Op. 32*
Maurice Ravel, *Daphnis et Chloe Suite No. 2*

**CHAMBER ORCHESTRA**

**Sunday, March 7, 2010**
Bailey Hall, Cornell University
Chammah, *New Songs with Oikos*
Dvorak Serenade for Strings
New work by Nicholas Walker

**Saturday, April 17, 2010**
Hamilton College
Jones, *World premiere work with Joseph Lin*
Bach, *Concerto in E Major with Joseph Lin*

**Saturday, May 1, 2010**
Jones, *World premiere work with Joseph Lin*
Bach, *Concerto in E Major with Joseph Lin*

Though he is always graceful and productive when doing so. Langford was a playful director that would crack several hilarious, though corny jokes during each rehearsal. Overall, the largest distinction between these two orchestras, however minute, is the reversed seating arrangements of the cello and the second violin sections.

In spite of these mild differences, the two orchestras have proven to be more similar than I previously expected. The number of concerts each orchestra plays per year is approximately the same. Both orchestras also perform for the youth as well as to raise money for the community. Each orchestra plays a variety of pieces, including more demanding ones. Both conductors heavily emphasize balance, dynamics, pitch, and the need for the players to practice on their own time. My conductors in both orchestras can get so into the music that they fling their batons into the distance, occasionally breaking them. Overall, I am happy that I decided to continue with orchestra and hopeful for all of the future opportunities it may bring.

-Mahina Wang, Chemical Engineering ‘12

“Music can change the world because it can change people.”

-Bono, U2

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